

Lesson 4: How do people disturb the balance?

Vocabulary

hazardous wastes substances that are very harmful to humans and other organisms

People and the Environment

Humans get food, shelter, and water from the land. Humans can also change the environment to meet their needs. For example, we cut down trees to get wood. This also gives us space to build houses. We clear fields to plant crops or build roads. These changes can upset the balance of ecosystems.

Products we make and use also affect ecosystems. Wastes from these products can pollute the air and water. For example, harmful chemicals from automobiles and factories pollute the air. These chemicals can hurt plants. Animals that eat these plants lose food. Animals that live on or near these plants lose shelter.

Wastes and chemicals get into rivers, lakes, and oceans. This pollutes the water. Some wastes come from sewer systems. Other chemicals are used on land. They help plants grow or kill bugs. Rain washes these chemicals into the water. Some of these chemicals can hurt or kill fish, plants, and animals. Another pollutant is oil. Sometimes oil spills when it is shipped or drilled. The oil covers algae, plants, mollusks, and fish. This makes them die. Birds covered in oil often drown.

Land Pollution

Garbage can pollute the land. Humans make a lot of garbage. Most trash is taken to a landfill and covered with dirt.

Hazardous wastes are also pollutants. They can be very dangerous to animals and humans. They can also start fires or cause diseases. Hazardous wastes used to be buried in the ground. They hurt nearby habitats.

Stripping Away the Land

Coal is a valuable substance. It is under the Earth's surface. Strip mining is one way to get coal. Huge machines used to dig large holes in the soil. The land around the holes washed away. Soil and rock were washed into ponds and rivers. Nearby ecosystems were greatly affected.

Land Reclamation

Now mining companies must replace the rock and soil they take away. They must also replant trees and grasses. This helps animals return to their habitats. Crops can be planted.

Preserving the Environment

The United States has created National Parks to protect land. These parks also protect the habitats of many plants and animals.

Yellowstone National Park was the first national park in the world. It is mostly in Wyoming. You can see geysers in Yellowstone. Geysers are springs that shoot hot water high into the air.

The Saguaro National Park is covered with cactuses. It is a home for many desert plants and animals. This park also protects very old villages.

Name _____

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Lesson 4 Checkpoint

1. Why do humans have a great impact on the environment?

2. What human activities damage the environment?

3. What are some of the effects of habitat destruction?

4. What are some things people have done to protect the environment?
